

## Walking Dead Literacies: Zombies, Boys, and (Re)Animated Storytelling

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**Teaser Text:** Curricular zombification occurs when pressures around standardization stifle classrooms. Revive interest in writing by inviting students to play and perform stories.

### Pause and Ponder:

As literacy researchers, teachers, and parents concerned with classroom activities, children's engagement in school and academic progress, we ask:

1. What is lost when play is absent in early childhood classrooms, and literacy curricula is *deadened* by standardization?
2. How might we find space for active storytelling and acknowledge the playful literacies that engage children?
3. How can we track the increased engagement with literacy and active storytelling? What can alternative forms of assessment reveal?

Christy: Can I see what you're using for your final performance?

Derrick: This is my, um, (holds up script and reads list of materials and characters):

nuclear laser, um distracter beams, Zide's boss [Zide is a YouTube zombie video game reviewer]

Willy: My flash dance (makes zombie puppet fly on yarn with outstretched arms)

Derrick: (continues over Willy), um, Zombie's boss, Michael Jackson, Janet Jackson,

Booom Zap Boom, KABOOOM!! FFFFFFFF (puppets collide)

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### **Meet the Zombie Boys**

In this K-1 classroom, a small group of avid zombie fans congregated in corners of the classroom and on playground perimeters, perpetually enacting zombie apocalypse battles. Christy came to affectionately refer to this group as the “Zombie Boys”. Christy was invited into a project-based K-1 multiage classroom with 46 children and 2 teachers to observe and support their end-of-year unit on off-the-page storytelling. The Zombie Boys kept busy during daily literacy play-based writing sessions. Together and apart, they sprawled across the floor and huddled in nooks, curating battle-torn puppets and wordlessly “narrating” epic war scenes with many crashes, booms, and pfffffffff pows!

One of the boys, Derrick, memorized the zombies’ flash mob dance from Michael Jackson’s *Thriller* video and practiced teaching it to the others. Derrick, taller and bigger than most of his K-1 peers, enjoyed “class clown” status. He enjoyed watching the television series *The Walking Dead* and playing zombie shoot-‘em-up videogames. Another boy, Milo, completely memorized Vincent Price’s grisly monologue from *Thriller* under Derrick’s direction. The third boy, Willy, spent most of his time constructing Transformer puppets he assumed fit into the plot of their story.

This storytelling group and the rest of the class spent four weeks “bringing stories to life” through a play-based storytelling unit. The vitality that permeated the classroom was palpable during action-packed activities in the storytelling unit that teachers developed for a curricular structure called literacy playshop.

### **Literacy Playshop in a K-1 Classroom**

*Literacy playshop* is a curricular approach that integrates play, storying, collaboration, and technology in learner-led production of an action text (Wohlwend, 2011) such as films,

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puppetry, pretend play, drama, or digital animation (Wohlwend et al, 2013). Putting the *play* up front in “playshop” recognizes the vital importance of play for young children’s learning and development. Aligning with research on play and writing in early literacy (Owocki, 1999; Whitmore & Goodman, 1995; Paley, 2004; Dyson, 2003; Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984), a playshop complements teacher-led reading and writing workshop to provide extended time for learners’ explorations and playful enactments. Small group collaborative storytelling is facilitated by just-in-time instruction as teachers check in with groups of children playing and filming stories, supported by whole group teacher-led minilessons, technique demonstrations, and daily closing sessions where students share highlights and teachers point out effective techniques that other groups might want to try. Just like *workshop* structures (e.g., Calkins, 1986), *playshop*’s minilessons are inspired by teachers’ observations as children pretend storylines, make props, make scene-changing backdrops, and create special voices and personalities for their characters.

The literacy playshop curricular model was developed in a five-year study in three early childhood classrooms (Wohlwend, 2018) where teams of K-1 teachers met regularly to develop methods for integrating technology and popular media through developmentally-appropriate media literacy curriculum for young children. While participating the teacher-designed media literacy curriculum project, the teachers invited researchers to class to document implementation of their playshop units (Wessel-Powell, Kargin & Wolwend, 2016; Wohlwend et al, 2013). In the second year of this study, we collected data from an elementary school in a Midwestern University town. Curriculum was designed around project-based, problem-based, and placed-based learning, and literacy instruction occurs through the workshop model. During a month-

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long literacy playshop unit, the research team worked closely with two classroom teachers, in a multi-aged K-1 classroom with 20 boys and 26 girls, aged 5 to 7 years.

Our research team collected video data as teachers co-taught the playshop unit they co-developed. After collecting film data, our team used video analysis methods to notice how storytelling groups performed stories. We looked specifically at how groups incorporated multimodal elements like sound and vocalization, gaze, movement, posture and gesture, all of which were modeled by teachers during minilessons.

For four weeks during the storytelling unit in this K-1 classroom, the day began with a 45-60 minute literacy playshop. Children were first invited to collaboratively create “unforgettable characters” that could “meet and pretend” with other characters. In small groups, players created stories that would be eventually be performed as live action plays or films in front of the class. In minilessons, the teachers pointed out exemplary storytelling techniques in mentor texts that included wordless Pixar Short films, picture books, reader’s theater scripts, and a visiting oral storyteller who performed folktales in class each Friday. Other instructional tools included anchor charts of storytelling teaching points, art and prop-making materials, instruments for sound effects, and hand-held digital cameras. Children used pencil-and-paper to write their own stories, but also were encouraged to intentionally manipulate other modes (e.g. gaze, posture, gesture, speech) to create and tell their action-filled stories (Wessel-Powell, Kargin & Wolwend, 2016).

The goals of the unit were for students to: (1) apply elements of strong storytelling to their stories, in both oral and written form; (2) collaborate coauthor and co-produce a story with at least one other peer; and (3) workshop their stories, revising them through rehearsal with an audience. In addition to minilessons, conferences with students, and mid-playshop teaching

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points, teachers also provided “share time” for students to perform in front of the class, and give feedback to peers (see Wessel-Powell, Kargin & Wolwend, 2016, for more detailed description of the unit, or see this link to the complete storytelling unit: [bit.ly/1JSeBHy](http://bit.ly/1JSeBHy))

Teachers in this classroom worked to align the literacy playshop curriculum with English Language Arts Common Core State Standards (CCSS). For example, the Kindergarten English Language Arts in the areas of writing, and speaking/listening state that children should:

- Use a **combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to narrate** a single event or several loosely linked events, **tell about the events in order** in which they occurred, and provide a reaction to what happened (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.K.3)
- Add drawings or **other visual displays** to descriptions as desired to provide additional detail (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.K.5)
- Participate in **collaborative conversations** with diverse partners about kindergarten topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.K.1)

Children in this classroom met these standards: 100% of the storytelling groups used “combinations of drawing and writing to narrate their sequential stories” on scripts and storyboards, and in addition, they exceeded the standard by performing their stories, creating “visual displays” with scenery, puppets, and special effects. They wrote collaboratively about self-selected topics in independent small groups (see Table 1). This aligns with recent research that shows that integrating play into writing time can take children far beyond the standards (see Souto-Manning & Yoon, 2017, ch. 7).

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**\*\*Insert Table 1 about here\*\***

## **Return of the Zombies**

The Zombie Boys took each minilesson as an invitation to develop characters that fit their media interests. They worked diligently on paper bag zombie puppets that ate “brain” props glued to popsicle sticks, launched imaginary nuclear missiles, flew dangling from strings, and moved by imaginary controls operated from within by tiny “Minion” drivers, yellow henchmen from Universal’s *Despicable Me* (2010). They created changeable backdrops modeled after the *Thriller* music video set on a file folder that shifted from “scary woods” to a movie theater, a cemetery scene, a haunted house, and finally outer space. Their script was narrator-driven, rather than dialogue-centric, depicting inter-species, intergalactic nuclear war through sound effects and action-filled fight scenes, set to the *Thriller* soundtrack.

The children’s interest in reenacting *Thriller*, a 1984 music video with a cast of staggering zombies starring Michael Jackson, seems somewhat perplexing. Why *Thriller*? It became clear that the music held as much appeal as its grisly characters. *Thriller* enjoyed a resurgence among adults in the 2000s in the form of flash mobs—at weddings, on streets, or on YouTube (Bench, 2014). As action-oriented storytellers, the Zombie Boys were drawn to recreating *Thriller*’s flash mob dance, memorizing its lyrics, and acting out its horror scenes. *Thriller*’s storyline is consistent with Rowsell’s (2016) description of zombie stories as gothic stories, which “[play] on fear, surprise, even terror,” using “five basic motifs: (1) a haunted house; (2) a young heroine or hero; (3) a villain or monster; (4) a dark, oppressive setting; and (5) societal taboos” (p.103). *Thriller* twists the gothic story genre with the tongue-in-cheek street dance Michael Jackson performs once he transforms into a zombie. Bench calls *Thriller* as

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“farical as it is frightening [with its]...dancing zombies” (p. 399), and this combo of gruesome-yet-funny clearly appealed to the boys in this study.

**\*\*Insert figures of Zombie Boys’ writing artifacts about here\*\***

The Zombie Boys storytelling process was constantly *in motion*. Their group moved spots around the room. Their rehearsals moved over tables and chairs. And paper cutouts fluttered to the floor in their wake. The boys’ storytelling process was not nice or neat, but it was *lively* and engaged. Most of their preparation involved co-writing scripts, building props with paper scraps strewn across tables, and play-fighting as rehearsal. Teachers encouraged props, character design, and story writing and revision during work/playtime. At times the boys received some attention and redirection from teachers checking in about their progress. Teachers sometimes encouraged the boys to focus on their script “choose a group,” since their collaboration was fluid and moment-to-moment; children often broke off into smaller or larger groupings at different points, typical of student play and collaboration in many early childhood classrooms. When the Zombie Boys performed in front of the class, their story was improvisational, which peers found entertaining. The feedback from the class pointed out that some parts of the story were hard to understand, which was a common peer critique during sharing time, in playshops and workshops, whether written products or enacted performances.

Given the emergent and fluid nature of their literacy play, how might we interpret Zombie Boys’ work as embodied literacy and vibrant storytelling– and articulate their literacy strengths?

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**Boys and Literacy...and Zombies**

Zombie stories written by K-1 children at school may cause some teachers to wonder if their topic choice is appropriate. The Zombie Boys' particular flavor of fandom warrants a closer look, as it intersects with cultural notions of gender, literacy, and childhood. Education and cultural studies scholars theorize the current cultural fixation on zombies as a metaphor that explains societal trends deadening education. Schooling itself is zombified through global forces of standardization and marketization, according to the theme of recent educational critiques by Carrington and colleagues' (2016) *Generation Z* and Ravitch's (2016) *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*. Carrington considers how *zombified* discourse circulates in contemporary boyhoods to construct "zombie young [as] slow witted, low achieving, lethargic and/or aggressive" (pg. 29).

Zombification also aligns with the longstanding construction of a "boy problem" in literacy-- the disengagement in reading and school literacies boys are perceived to exhibit, causing them to lag behind in school (Newkirk, 2002). One solution is to provide a permeable literacy curriculum (Dyson, 2003; Yoon, 2018) that permits children to write about their favorite popular media, such as zombies.

The connection between the Zombie Boys' writing topic, and these theorized notions of zombification is only coincidental. We argue that these children's interests in embodying zombies in storytelling lets them experience *richer, more lively* engagement in literacy. Their zombie fandom is not an indicator of disengagement, low achievement, or aggression.

Since the Zombie Boys focused most of their time and energies on rehearsing lyrics and dance scenes and creating paper characters without storyboarding or script writing each day, teachers had only a few traditional written artifacts to assess their progress. So, teachers decided

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to capture how the process of their co-creation compared with other groups in the classroom who progressed more predictably with written artifacts delineating their work's progress: *In terms of literacy activities and storytelling expertise, how did this group compare? What features did they use to bring their stories to life-- and what evidence do we have?*

To answer this question, we used a multimodal storytelling checklist (Table 2). This tool began as the teachers' checklist on each child's progress during the unit, and we expanded it to cover the full range of modes we saw teachers teaching (Wessel-Powell, Kargin & Wolwend, 2016). The multimodal storytelling checklist is not intended to be an evaluative assessment. Instead, like a 'noticing map' (Lysaker, in press), this checklist can document teacher observations. The checklist also organized our analysis and helped us to map each group's story. We used the checklist to document evidence that groups included standards-based story elements and we also mapped the modes that groups leveraged to convey story meaning. Alternative forms of assessment can intentionally capture both the storytelling process *and* the products children generated over time. We found that using the teachers' criteria for lessons learned (i.e., minilessons) and literacy expertise (using the multimodal storytelling checklist), this group displayed evidence for rich, meaningful literacy engagement during active storytelling in the forms of oral performance and written/created artifacts.

In the following sections we describe how the multimodal storytelling checklist answered the teachers' questions and enabled our analysis of the Zombie Boys' storytelling processes and performance across three domains:

1. *Narrative complexity and story shape*, or how the group represented elements of their story through multimodal resources as mapped onto the checklist as well as a story graph

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2. *Minilesson uptake*, or how the group absorbed and then demonstrated competency in taking up teachers' minilessons on both writing craft and dramatic performance
3. *Considering their audience*, or how the other children responded when the group performed their story during "share time" for peer and teacher feedback.

### **Narrative Complexity and Story Shape**

Teachers modeled narrative story shapes (e.g. problem-solution, beginning/middle/end, circle stories) using illustrative picture books and short films. They also discussed narrative elements that good storytellers include, such as surprise endings, introducing character traits and motivations, utilizing a narrator, and showing plot progression. As a part of each minilesson on story shapes and narrative elements, teachers suggested students think about where to include these ideas in their own stories. The group's storyline complexity reveals how they told stories using multimodal representation. Since teachers focused on different aspects of writing craft and dramatic storytelling in minilessons, the multimodal storytelling checklist below, is organized according to teachers' minilesson topics.

Many other groups look almost monomodal, checking off only a few boxes on the checklist. Not so with the *Zombie Boys*. Their checklist reveals key points where it is clear: (1) action-oriented storytelling used embodiment and storytelling artifacts to propel the story forward, and (2) they saw their story as a "movie" with a soundtrack and visual elements specific to that genre (e.g., rolling credits at the end, *superhero movie-style* intergalactic battle performance).

**[Insert Table 2 (Checklist) about here]**

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Teachers' modeling of *beginning/middle/end*, *problem/solution* story shapes, and *surprise ending*, guided the alternative assessment we used to look at the Zombie Boys' storyline.

Following the teachers' model, we mapped the story shape of their performance to gauge the degree of narrative complexity, based on elements taught. To do this, we created a story graph (Dymock, 2007) with key plot points (see Figure 1).

**[Insert Figure 1 (Story Graph) about here]**

A basic plot line indicates the Zombie Boys' story utilized *beginning/middle/end* as a story shape, and within each major story section, they also used a number of *problem/solution* pairs. In addition, they improvised a *surprise ending* at the conclusion of their performance. Their story was sophisticated structurally, and dynamic in terms of action, intentional twists and rising action.

### Minilesson Uptake

Teachers taught daily minilessons on various aspects of writing craft and dramatic performance at the beginning of literacy playshop time, before groups dispersed to work on stories together. One question we had as we observed students' collaborations, including the Zombie Boys' daily play-fight scenes and disorganized progression through the playshop unit was: *What are they picking up from this teaching and getting out of this unit?* Was literacy playshop simply an opportunity to play, or in their own way were they engaging with storytelling models teachers provided, integrating examples and soaking up direction provided by teachers through minilessons?

Teachers regularly reigned in the Zombie Boys by encouraging them to hit goals, meet deadlines, show evidence of their work, and organize during conferences. Additionally, while

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their shared performance was not easily understood by a peer audience, comparing the cycle of minilessons to the Zombie Boys' shared performance revealed they took up of the *all* dramatic performance minilessons, and most of the writing craft minilessons (see Table 2). We determined whether minilessons were taken up by analyzing evidence in children's scripts, story artifacts (props, characters, backdrops), feedback in the form of informal written rubrics/checklists from teachers, filmmaking-in-progress video, and filmed performances. Evidence of learning from the minilessons across the unit indicates Zombie Boys were paying attention, intentionally crafting a story using suggestions modeled by teachers, and embellished through their imaginative tangents. They took up every dramatic performance-based minilessons with gusto, and five out of eight writing craft-based minilessons.

**[Insert Table 2 about here]**

Three writing craft-based minilessons were only taken up "in part." The first minilesson, *Storytellers collaborate and work together to tell the same story*, was evident in the performance when all four children coordinated actions; however during planning times, the group of four sometimes broke off from one another. The second minilesson, *Storytellers use a storyboard to plan out the parts of their story*, was attempted but did not determine the story's ultimate plot, something we saw regularly across classrooms as children improvise and follow new ideas. And the third, *Storytellers write scripts to remember who says what when*, was used in planning stages and at the performance--the narrator created a script and referred to it at times--but not all the children in the group were privy to its contents; and the narrator frequently went off-script. However, it is important to remember that coordinating collaboration independently in a small group is a complex task, for K-1 students, and that there is value in dramatic improvisation

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which is at the heart of pretend play. We see the improvisation with craft lessons as an indicator of play's fluid, energizing properties that enabled new storyline ideas to emerge.

### **Considering the Audience: Share Time**

The Zombie Boys enjoyed an attentive audience during their share time, despite (or perhaps because of) a few moments of improvisation during their final performance. The performance began promisingly, beginning with the group singing *Thriller's* opening beats: "Bum bummm! Bum bum bum... buh buh buh buh buh bum... buh buh buh buh buh bum..." and continued with a version of Vincent Price's morbid monologue: "...funk of 40 years, is grisly for to see, those are the ones that shivers." As Michael and Janet Jackson puppets approached the graveyard, Derrick, narrator and stage manager, shouted out, "Wait, who's playing the zombies? I'll play the zombies..." Grabbing two zombie puppets, he lurched toward Michael and Janet salivating for "braaaaaiiiins...braaaaaiiiins..." The Jackson puppeteers "screamed" and, as a second narrator explained, ran for cover in a haunted house: "Mike and Janet Jackson sees a door, and they get inside it and slam the door, and..." At this point the puppeteers began more talking amongst themselves about where the haunted house was on their stage, and how to act out this part, as the audience watched. The puppets escaped, and soon, in-talk between the boys interrupted the story's flow more frequently, punctuating scenes with disjointed rehearsals, in the stepping-in-and-out-of-play that is typical of early childhood collaboration and pretense (Sawyer, 2003).

As they moved into the middle of their performance, a *nonverbal attack action* took up a large part of the storytelling on stage, causing audience confusion about direction of the storyline:

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G: Oh no, looks like there's a war

A: (Flying and bumping zombie puppets into one another) Boom! Pffffff! KaBOOM!

G: (Janet puppet) gaaaaah! Michael Jackson diiiid! (A's zombie puppet 'eats' Janet)

...

W and A: (Continue to 'fight' 2 zombie puppets together with sound effects)

G: Nuclear missile!

A: (Holding puppet up to show audience) Nuclear missile. The robots have a nuclear missile.

(wordless fighting continues)

Although the audience was initially entertained by these antics, this waned after the improvisational performance went on for nearly nine minutes--a significant amount of time in a K-1 student's world. After a few prompts from teachers to "find your ending", the performance came to a close.

Then, children in the audience clicked into their familiar role of *peer editors*. The boys were allotted three questions or comments from the group, all of which were suggestions to change the story so it was "more clear" and understandable:

Peer: Um, I think you need to work on making it more clear, because I didn't really know what was happening.

Teacher1: So it sounded like it needs to be more clear for the audience to be sure. That's some good feedback to think about for next time.

Teacher2: I know sometimes we think it's clear to us, cause we know the story, Derrick, and Milo. A story might be clear to *us* if it's *our* story, and we know it, but the *audience*

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has never seen it. So you have to make it clear for the audience. So if there's a lot of *pchchch pow pooow!* That might not be clear to the audience for what is happening. Ok?

Analysis of the multimodal checklist, coupled with observation, tells us although they have rich, multimodally-represented elements of storytelling in place (e.g. puppet characters, backdrop settings, and a rehearsed storyline with narrator), *Zombie Boys* still have some revision to do. Next steps for them as storytellers need to include *considering their audience*. For example, having clear markers for each episode or scene (such as a movie title card), or having an extra pair of hands handle multiple character voices, action, and narrator direction may be helpful next-step suggestions for these young writers.

### **Reviving Literacy Through Play**

Play is integral to young children's learning and development. Given intensified academic pressures that K-1 classrooms are experiencing (Yoon 2015), accommodating outlets for play is increasingly difficult. This is inherently inequitable (Dyson 2008), particularly for marginalized groups of children, making disparity of access to play in early education is an issue of social justice (Wohlwend, 2016). In this classroom, teachers' literacy playshop unit leveraged play and expanded way of viewing children's multimodal storytelling practices as literacy strengths.

At a time when meaning and process in writing are often usurped by efforts to prepare children to write as response to test prompts, and kindergarten implementation of established meaning-based literacy programs such as a writing workshop remains challenging (Kramer-Vida, Levitt, & Kelly, 2012), we are arguing we need to go even further. We are challenging a

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print-intensive paper-and-pencil, words-only, sit-quietly, follow-directions regimen in early writing that creates a deadened response in young writers. Infusing playshop elements into writing time has the power to awake dead literacies and bring writing workshop back to life. In this classroom, zombies became forces for good, and the Zombie Boys' active storytelling is an example of what might be possible if play is leveraged as a storytelling tool.

We can see that the Zombie Boys were *doing* literacy work asked of them if we only take time to dig deeper and look at multimodal aspects of their storytelling. Through multiple forms of assessment and observation over time, they demonstrate storytelling acumen to teachers, despite producing fewer written artifacts. Perhaps most significant, there was engagement and joy in the daily process of storytelling with friends for this group of children.

Teachers in this study allowed the boys to perform a zombie story for peers and devoted time to developing that storyline in class each day. Rather than being frightened off by a potential *moral panic* (Buckingham and Jensen 2012), that is, disapproval from parents or administrators who might have viewed the zombies as inappropriate at school, teachers chose to make the literacy curriculum permeable and playful and to let children follow their interests and passions. That decision by teachers represents instructional courage and a dedication to enabling children's interests to drive curriculum.

Imagining with teachers interested in braving the unknown and entering into a child-led storytelling unit to explore playshop in their classrooms is an act of creativity. In this classroom, playshop was infused into workshop time during an end-of-year month-long unit on multimodal storytelling to create movies and plays. We see literacy playshop as a complement to writing workshops. We also recognize that this approach to active storytelling and documenting literacy strengths requires a degree of curricular freedom. At this school, teachers enjoy autonomy in a

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schoolwide pedagogical philosophy that is based on inquiry and hands-on learning. Thus, teachers gave students in this group lots of space and time: a nine minute performance time, plus four minutes of feedback, preceded by weeks of playful rehearsals. We acknowledge this may not feel possible in every school. However, the addition of a playshop and learner-based exploration has potential to re-energize young writers and reanimate early literacies while addressing multiple literacy standards.

### **Take Action!**

Engage zombified literacies through an open, play-based literacy unit:

1. Decide, when would this fit into your calendar? Weekly? Monthly? At the end of the school year?
2. Consider, what additions to workshop would most inspire your students to engage playfully? Craft materials to create props, puppets and scenery? Costumes or toys?
3. Plan: what minilessons on writing craft and dramatic performance might nudge young writers to emulate exemplary storytellers? What “mentor texts” in the form of picture books, short films, plays or oral storytellers could you show students to inspire their multimodal writing?
4. Kidwatch: what media interests do students bring to school already, on backpacks, t-shirts and pencil cases-- could those be integrated into playshop time? As the unit rolls out, how are students responding, and what needs to be adjusted?
5. Make your case: if you anticipate questions or pushback about integrating play into writing time, review Common Core State Standards. There are multiple writing, reading, and listening/speaking standards addressed, and transcended with playshop. For

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example, writing standards suggest students should “use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to compose”, while playshop *also* includes dramatization composing.

### More to Explore...

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- Common Core Standards for ELA:  
[http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI\\_ELA%20Standards.pdf](http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI_ELA%20Standards.pdf)
- Film in the Classroom lesson plans from New York Times Learning Network:  
[http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/teaching-topics/film-in-the-classroom/?\\_r=0#filmmaking](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/teaching-topics/film-in-the-classroom/?_r=0#filmmaking)
- 16 Websites and Apps for Making Videos and Animation via Graphire:  
<https://www.graphire.org/blog/16-websites-and-apps-for-making-videos-and-animation>

### List of Figure Captions

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- Figure 2: Cemetery and Haunted House backdrops, Zombie puppets
- Figure 3: Student script revision with teacher feedback on a sticky note
- Figure 4: Zombie puppets featured on class anchor chart to give peers inspiration to add moving parts to their puppets
- Figure 5: Zombie Boys co-writing a script
- Figure 6: Close-up of script: opening beats to *Thriller* soundtrack

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**Table 1. Storytelling Groups**

Storytelling Groups	Group Size	Storyline	W.K.3	SL.K.5	SL.K.1
Cloudy	4	Anime-like characters Cloudy, Flame and Rainbow wield magical powers			
Bee and Mrs. Grandma	2	Bee visits Grandma's flower garden			
Worm and Cat	2	Cat antagonizes Worm through a series of antics			
Dragon and Princess	2	Dragon steals Princess, but she is rescued			
Witchy	3	Forest animals escape an evil witch			
Zombie	4	Zombies reenact <i>Thriller</i> and fight robots			
Space Travel	2	Funny aliens fly in space			
Snail and Snake	2	Snail and Snake meet in a magic volcano land			
Fighter	2	A prize fighter wins the championship			
High Schoolers	2	High school kids rule their school			
Mr. Bag	3	A bag family goes on adventures			
Deer and Hunter	3	Deer eludes Hunter on a chase			
Mr. Penguin	3	Girl has penguin friend			

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Pizza Monster	2	Orangy eats a lot of pizza			
Big John and Little John	2	A hero and zombie duo fight the Queen			
Mr. Strong	3	Mr. Strong is a University mascot			
Sparky and Rocky	2	Lightening Bolt and Rock			
Birdy	3	Birds and butterflies become friends			

Note: Grey-met the standard; Red-exceeded the standard.

**Table 2. Multimodal Storytelling Checklist of Zombie Group’s Narrative Complexity**

Writing Craft	Zombie Boys’ Evidence					
<b>Make characters</b>	Created robot, 4 zombies (named Redax, Blueax [ <i>Redux</i> is a zombie videogame], Zide, and Zide’s boss [Zide is a YouTube zombie videogame reviewer]), Michael and Janet Jackson puppets who acted out multiple scenes together. Characters had movable appendages.					
	■ Image	□ Gaze	□ Print	□ Talk	□ Sound	■ Movement
<b>Make story backdrops</b>	Two file folder backdrops ‘changed scenes’ from <i>Thriller</i> : (1) movie theater, to (2) graveyard, to (3) forest, as Jacksons moved across the story. File folders doubled as a puppet theater.					
	■ Image	■ Gaze	□ Print	□ Talk	□ Sound	□ Movement
<b>Write story in script format:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Include different characters &amp; narrator</li> <li>● Write collaborative</li> </ul>	Script largely followed Michael Jackson’s <i>Thriller</i> music video, with Michael and “Janet” in a forest at night, then retreating to a building before the night is overtaken by zombies and a graveyard. Characters talk (zombie groan or fight), narrator explains. One child largely directs.					

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<p>story with group members</p>	<p>Story appeared improvised and play-based during performance, rather than rehearsed and stable. The alternative ending (improvised during performance, <u>not</u> included on written script) sees a Robot taking zombies into outer space, throwing them into a black hole.</p>					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Image	<input type="checkbox"/> Gaze	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Print	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Talk	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sound	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Movement
<p><b>Consider story shape:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Beginning/ middle/ end or other clear organization</li> <li>● Clear problem &amp; solution</li> <li>● Surprise ending</li> </ul>	<p><u>Beginning:</u> Michael and Janet vs. Zombies (scene: movie theater, cemetery)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Michael and Janet leave movie theater and enter graveyard; <i>Thriller</i> song begins</li> <li>● <u>Problem:</u> Zombies approach</li> <li>● <u>Solution:</u> Michael and Janet run to haunted house (scene change: haunted house setting)</li> <li>● <u>Problem:</u> zombies pursue them and eat Janet</li> <li>● <u>Solution:</u> Michael breaks the window to escape</li> </ul> <p><u>Middle:</u> Zombies vs. Robots battle</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <u>Problem:</u> Robots arrive and battles zombies (scene change: war setting)</li> <li>● <u>Solution:</u> Robots launch nuclear missile</li> <li>● <u>Problem:</u> Zombies re-emerge from graves, surprising Robot as invincible</li> </ul> <p><u>End/Solution:</u> zombies disposed of in outer space (surprise ending); <b>teachers encourage sticking to script and finding a speedier ending during performance.</b></p> <p><u>Continued 'End':</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <u>Solution:</u> Missile launches zombie into space and gets sucked into a black hole</li> <li>● <u>Surprise happy ending:</u> Skies turn white again, Robot stands up on stage, Michael and Janet Jackson come back to life</li> <li>● Credits roll to <i>Star Wars</i> song</li> </ul>					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Image	<input type="checkbox"/> Gaze	<input type="checkbox"/> Print	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Talk	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sound	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Movement

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Dramatic Performance	Zombie Boys' Evidence					
<p><b>Consider sound:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use different voices for characters &amp; narrator</li> <li>• Change volume based on characters: loud, quiet &amp; in-between</li> <li>• Change volume to express different feelings</li> </ul>	<p>Character voices changed: high-pitched Janet, low-pitched Vincent Price, dramatic sound effects depict zombie battles, fighting and weapons; robotic Robot voice; frightened characters' screams. Music used to set the mood at the beginning (<i>Thriller</i> beat) and signal movie credits at the end.</p>					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Image	<input type="checkbox"/> Gaze	<input type="checkbox"/> Print	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Talk	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sound	<input type="checkbox"/> Movement
<p><b>Use movement:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use tools to create character movement</li> <li>• Use body to show action</li> </ul>	<p>Puppet characters moved in front of/behind scenery, off-stage to “outer space” and into a “black hole.” One zombie had moveable arms and could “fly” on yarn strings. Another was controlled by a small pilot, like a Transformer.</p>					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Image	<input type="checkbox"/> Gaze	<input type="checkbox"/> Print	<input type="checkbox"/> Talk	<input type="checkbox"/> Sound	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Movement
<p><b>Show feelings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Say &amp; do things with characters to express feelings</li> <li>• Use facial expressions, posture &amp; gesture to show characters' feelings</li> </ul>	<p>Characters expressed fear, surprise, and anger through sound effects, voice and sharp movements.</p>					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Image	<input type="checkbox"/> Gaze	<input type="checkbox"/> Print	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Talk	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sound	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Movement
<p><b>Show perspective:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Zoom in &amp; out</li> </ul>	<p>No use of zoom in/out; did consider camera angles in film “credit roll,” spiral fight scene, changing backdrops</p>					
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Image	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Gaze	<input type="checkbox"/> Print	<input type="checkbox"/> Talk	<input type="checkbox"/> Sound	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Movement

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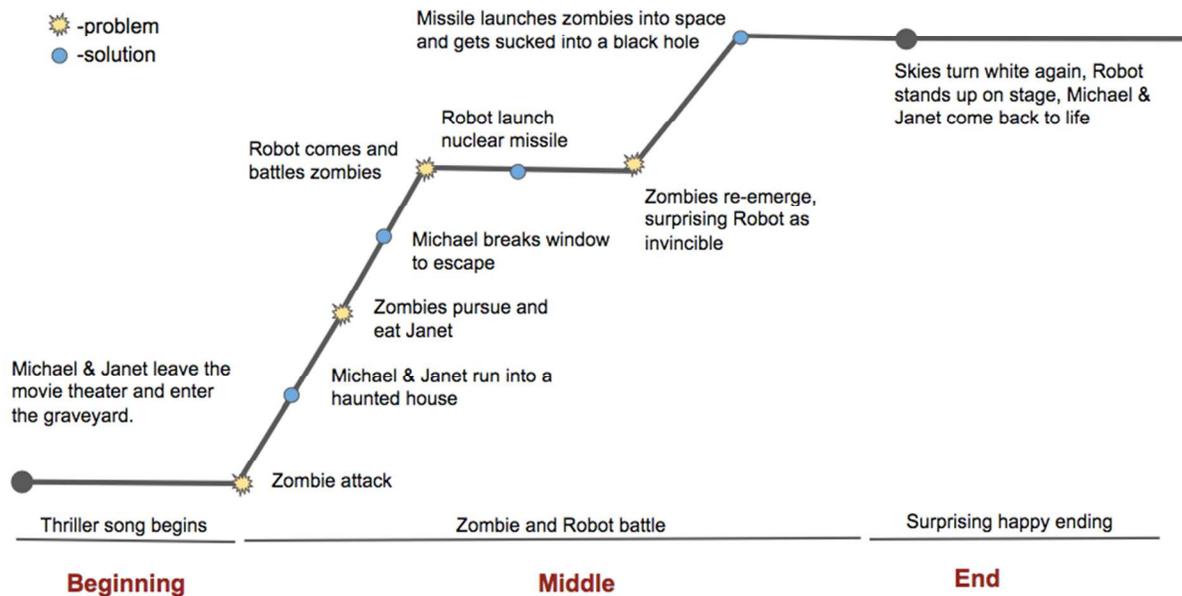
**Table 3. Minilessons Taken Up by Zombie Boys Group**

<b>Writing Craft Minilessons</b>	<b>Zombie Boys Take Up?</b>		
	<b>Yes</b>	<b>In Part</b>	<b>No</b>
Storytellers invent strong characters.			
Characters interact with each other, they come together to make a problem or fix a problem.			
Storytellers build sets, backdrops, depending on form story takes.			
Storytellers show different parts of the story from different perspectives.			
Different kinds of stories have different shapes			
Storytellers collaborate and work together to tell the same story.			
Storytellers use a storyboard to plan out the parts of their story.			
Storytellers write scripts to remember who says what when.			
<b>Dramatic Performance Minilessons</b>			
Storytellers cast a spell on their audience with sight and sound			
Storytellers use different voices and movements for different characters.			
Strong characters do or say things that SHOW how they feel or what they think.			
Storytellers make movies.			

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What role do you play? Actor, director, filmer, designer.			
Publishing: prepare for a film festival, performance, or puppet show.			

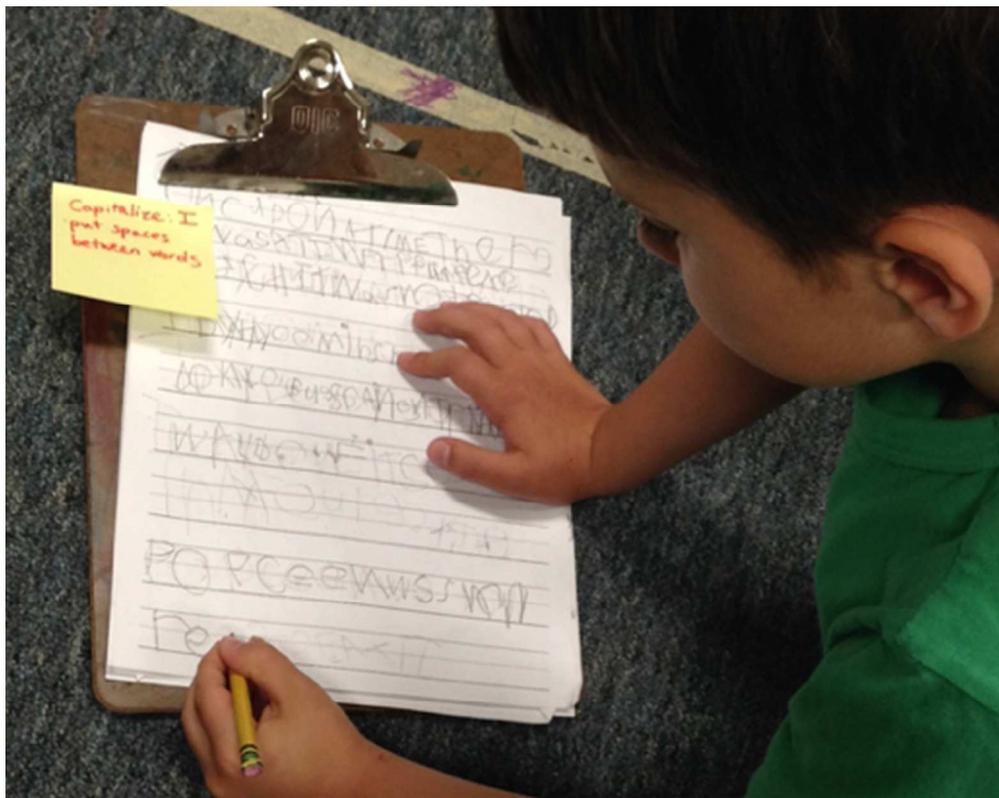
Figure 1.: Zombie Boys' Plot



Note: The graph's X axis represents rise/fall in *danger*, as plot points move along sequentially from beginning, to middle, to end.



Cemetery and Haunted House backdrops, Zombie puppets



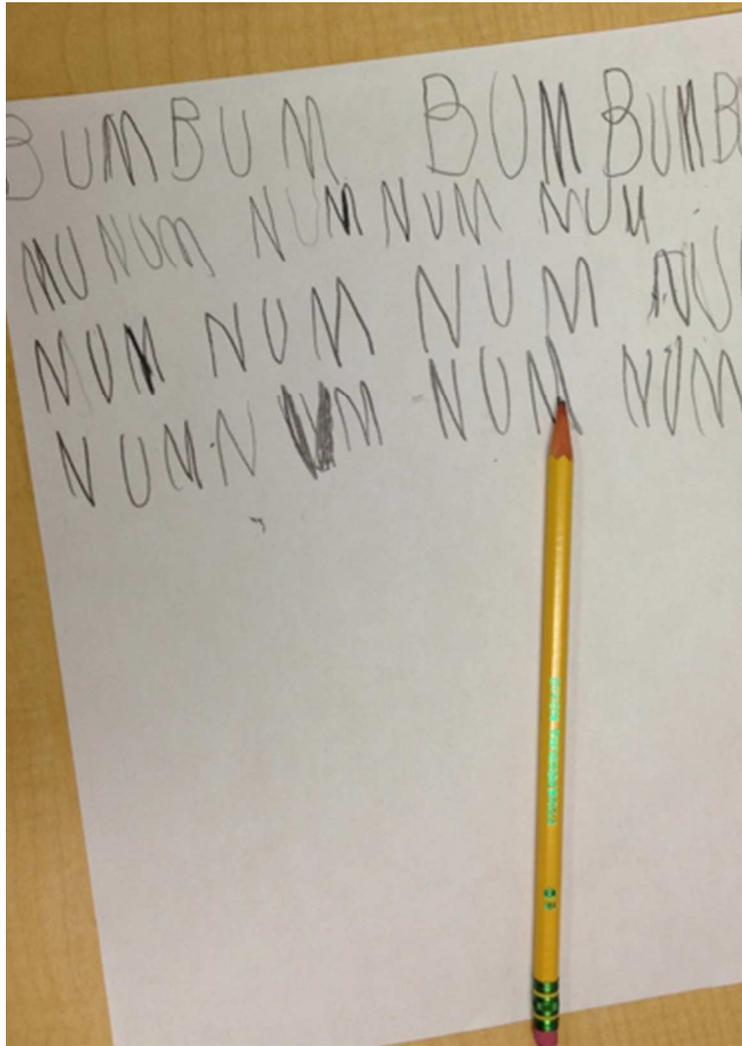
Student script revision with teacher feedback on a sticky note



Zombie puppets featured on class anchor chart to give peers inspiration to add moving parts to their puppets



Zombie Boys co-writing a script



Close-up of script: opening beats to Thriller soundtrack